LESSONS WITH "THE LITTLE TEACHER"

THE LITTLE TEACHER ALWAYS KEEPS the CHILDREN for A FAIRY STORY AFTER SCHOOL.

BAPTISTE HAS BEEN at WORK in the MUNITIONS FACTORY

THE LITTLE TEACHER BRINGS BAPTISTE BACK TO LIFE AFTER A KNOCK OUT BLOW.

FROM the very rise of the curtain on "The Little Teacher" it is easy to see that *Emily West*, the heroine, is a girl with a gladsome heart. The late Harry James Smith, who wrote the play, pictured the little teacher as one of that blessed company able to bring love and happiness to all about her.

The first minutes of the play show *Emily's* efforts to beautify her surroundings. On the walls of the school room are recent pictures all out of harmony with the dingy aspect of the place, and from the group of children kept after school comes a spirit of love, kindness and humor. The very first reference to the teacher tells of her womanly sympathy, for to the children, *Pansy Rollins, Lucius Bowman, Aggie, Andy, Marie* and the rest, quarrelling among themselves, there come *Mrs. Caldwell* and *Miss Meech*, two very estimable ladies of uncertain age, who are told that the teacher is absent because "she had to take *Denny Squires* home with nosebleed."

"Nosebleed!" snaps the disapproving *Mrs. Caldwell*, who has been looking critically about the schoolroom. "That's a new reason for taking a child home!"

Pansy Rollins, who has been left in charge, agrees with them, but explains that the hemorrhage was very bad. And one feels sorry for the little teacher as the two women question the youngsters, for the visitors are overwhelmingly critical. They even criticise the children to their faces and make the youngsters, who were so happy a few minutes before, remember drunken orgies of their parents, and listen with great joy to a little girl's description of how the lumber men call after her as she goes to and from school.

The little party is augmented by the appearance of *Neal Brockway*, chairman of the Goshen School Committee. *Brockway* is a power in the community—a man particularly suave for a New England community—well dressed, young in spite of his forty years. He is warmly greeted by the visiting ladies.

"You're just the man we want to see, *Mr. Brockway*," *Mrs. Caldwell* explains. "We've been instructed to make recommendations for or against inviting *Miss West* to join our Ladies Parish Circle over to Goshen Centre." Then they proceed to learn all that *Brockway* knows about *Emily West*.

They discover that she was hired because she was the daughter of *Robert West*, who had been born in Goshen Centre, but who moved away to New York city, where *Emily* was born and educated. They learn that she receives $9 a week, and that six of it goes to *Mrs. Hodges* for board. They hear of the bad reputation of Goshen Hollow, and how the two previous teachers had left the place. For every good word that *Brockway* may say they have one of disparagement, and when one of the children who has been listening with awed silence announces that teacher is running toward the schoolhouse the two women jump to the window and exclaim in horror at *Emily's* long strides and her hatless head.

Emily comes racing in—and it is as if a cloud has been lifted from the room. The children's faces lighten with pleasure, though the two ladies exchange glances and pass mental judgment which condemns *Emily* to social ostracism. *Emily* would dismiss the children at once, but they confess to being rude, and so are made to stay longer. The ladies, however, decide that there is no reason why they should remain. Even *Emily's* reference to her loneliness does not move them, and they go away quite sure that she is not suitable to be recognized socially.

When they are gone the children gather about *Emily* for a good night story, their favorite "Ugly Duckling," which ends, "It matters not that you have been born in a duckyard so long as you have lain in a swan's egg."

"I wish I was an Ugly Duckling," little *Andy* decides wistfully.

"I wish I was an Ugly Duckling," his little sister *Marie* echoes. And teacher tells them that sometimes the fairy stories are the truest.

The children all run and put on their wraps, calling a gay good night as they leave, but when it comes time for *Andy* and little *Marie* to say good night there are tears in the little girl's eyes.

Emily asks why and learns the old but always new pathetic story of two little lovable children who are not appreciated at home, two little children who are beaten and abused by *Gresham*, a drunken father, and his wife, *Liz*, a cruel Italian woman, who seems to have no mother love in her heart. *Emily* tells them that they must go home to-night, but that soon she will try to find a way to make them happy.

The children have hardly disappeared when *Brockway* comes back, offering to take *Emily* riding with him—there is something sinister about *Brockway* and his assertion that he is easy to get along with if he is not antagonized. *Emily* is not frightened, however, though she is relieved by the excited shouts of the lumbermen who have been working near the school house. One of the men has been injured by a blow over the heart and *Emily* fixes a place for him on the bench. Skilled through years of caring for her father, the girl knows just what first aid methods to carry out.

"What happened to him?" she asks the busy lumberman.

"Got hit," the big fellow replies, and gradually *Emily* finds how. It was the lumberman who sent the blow, and *Emily* censures him angrily, calling him cowardly to hit a smaller man. *Brockway* in the meantime goes away disgusted that *Emily* should waste so much care and sympathy.

Gradually the man resuscitates. He is a French-Canadian named *Batiste*, and when he has recovered consciousness *Emily* hears a story that thrills her and makes her realize that *Pug*, the big lumberman, has more chivalry in his character than many so-called gentlemen. The blow that has nearly killed little *Batiste* was delivered because *Batiste* had dared to speak slurringly of the little teacher, and in spite of *Pug's* efforts to make the man stop he tells of *Pug's* devotion. *Pug* takes the informer away, feeling sure that *Batiste* is able to walk and anxious to cover his own confusion. When they have gone *Emily* prepares to leave the school house for the night. She had hardly had time to put on her hat when little *Andy* and *Marie* come racing to her, filled with childish agony. Their father is drunk again and has threatened to beat them. *Andy*, a sturdy boy, says that he does not care for himself, but *Marie* is so little. Even as they talk the drunken *Gresham* comes in demanding his children, cursing, reviling, telling *Emily* to mind her own business. *Emily* gathers the children about her and calmly draws from the velvet bag that she always carries her father's old revolver.

"You shan't beat them—you don't dare touch them," *Emily* defies him, and she points the weapon at him.

"Now go," *Emily* tells him, "and don't wait outside, for the revolver will go home with me—so will the children!" And through the window she watches him reel down the road. Then she and the children go merrily to *Emily's* boarding house.

Things are not quite so merry a few hours later, for *Mrs. Hodges*, with whom *Emily* boards, is not fond of children. She is a stern New Englander who, once deprived of the thing she loves, has closed her life to love and all happiness. Another stumbling block is *Zekel*, *Mrs. Hodges's* hired man, who tells *Emily* that neither he nor *Mrs. Hodges* "likes sparrowgrass, neither of us likes cats, and neither of us likes them sort," and he wags a thumb at the children.

Emily is not discouraged, however—she is too happy to think that for the first time in their lives the two youngsters have had a warm bath and plenty of supper. They go toddling off to bed, *Mrs. Hodges* watching the procedure with great disgust and dismay. Part of the dismay is that she fears the consequences of what may happen because of *Emily's* action. And she is not comforted by the arrival of *Brockway*, who, having heard of the adoption of the two children, hastens forward to warn *Emily* that she had better return them to their parents. From all sides *Emily* is threatened and cautioned by turn, and she welcomes the arrival of *Pug* and *Batiste*, the former calling because *Emily* has asked him to be sure and tell her how *Batiste* recovers, the latter to express his gratitude and show that he is in fit condition.

Batiste does not stay very long—*Pug* has warned him that it will mean bodily harm if he remains to spoil *Pug's* chance for a talk with *Emily*—and so it is that the two are seated on opposite sides of the table, *Emily* busy with her embroidery, *Pug* watching with love lit eyes.

Mrs. Hodges, who has been passing through the room, attracts *Pug's* curiosity, and finally he remarks:

"Funny thing, the country, now; did you ever notice it?—they think that there is something kinky about you if your postmark is New York."

"Oh, are you from New York?" *Emily* asks with astonishment. "If I could only be in a New York crowd again," she tells him, "a dear, heavenly New York crowd. Do you know, sometimes I can't keep the tears back, I get so hungry for rush hour in the subway."

"It is grand, ain't it?" *Pug* enthuses.

"That's it exactly. At 5 o'clock I say to myself, they are all in the subway trains tearing along uptown, laughing, joking and reading each other's papers; the girls are planning for the show that somebody is going to take them to that evening, and fathers are going home to mothers and little babies, and oh, I don't know how to say it, but you know what I mean, don't you?"

Pug does, and he remarks philosophically, "It must be hell to be born in the country!"

Then *Emily* tells him that she was born on 109th street, where the elevated goes round the high curve, and *Pug* confesses that he first saw light in Hoboken, that he was a waif and that the Sisters of Charity had been his own mothers. It is then that *Emily* learns his name for the time—Polycarp Dermott—"Just the kind of a name a mother superior would pick," he explains.

As they know one another better the two begin to exchange personal confidences and *Emily* tells of the two little children that she has brought home with her. He is still expressing his views that anything she does is right when *Mrs. Hodges*, her mind quite made up to the course that she must pursue, comes marching in and before *Pug* tells *Emily* that she cannot keep the children in her home. *Emily* reasons with her, tells her that she is sure *Mrs. Hodges* cannot mean that she will turn the children out, and as she talks she touches the heart strings of the elder woman, tuning them with love and making them vibrate with memories. *Mrs. Hodges* tells her secret, how her own little baby died, and how she never wanted a child in her life again.

"Oh, but that is not the way to find peace, dear," *Emily* tells her. "Open your heart—God does not mean love to starve in us. He means us to give it to some one; it's needed somewhere always, always!"

And *Mrs. Hodges* cries for the first time in years.

The next question that bothers them is *Gresham*, for *Mrs. Hodges* knows that he has murder in his heart. *Pug*, however, a silent witness to the scene, soon dispels this fear, for he assures the two women that as long as there is any danger he will stay. Stay he does, and later, after the children have wakened and come softly down the stairs, only to promise to go back to bed at once if *Emily* will sing to them, he sees *Gresham*, gag in hand, come sneaking into the room, and quietly, without disturbing the three at the organ, he claps his hand over *Gresham's* mouth and runs him out of the room.

A month passes, a month of spring in the Vermont hills. *Pug*, or *Polycarp*, as *Emily* insists on calling him, is happy in the hills, and *Emily* is teaching him to write and read—has taught him to speak properly—and each day he spends some short time in study.

One Saturday morning, as he is in the schoolhouse studying some arithmetic, *Mrs. Caldwell* and *Miss Meech* arrive, partly out of curiosity, partly because they expect to be present at a meeting called for later in the morning—a meeting which will decide whether the little teacher is to be allowed to keep the two little waifs that she loves, or whether they must be returned to *Gresham* and his Italian wife.

Mrs. Caldwell has little use for *Pug* and does not hesitate to say so. Even when *Pug* tries to defend himself she asks him if he knows what other people are saying about his attentions to the little teacher and her two small charges. *Pug* is inclined to laugh, but he changes his mind when *Mrs. Caldwell* tells him that the way he can help *Emily* best is to go away and never come back.

"In less than one hour the school committee and the chairman of the board of selectmen will be here. They will decide what's to be done with the children. Their parents have petitioned to get 'em back, and there's a majority favors their petition. If *Miss West's* got any claim at all, your being here will ruin it just as sure as Shiloh come. You've got to go."

And go he does, first being assured by Mrs. Caldwell that she will speak in favor of *Emily* keeping the children. *Pug* explains his action to *Emily* by saying that he has felt the call of the spring. The lumbering is over, and he must go and find work. *Batiste* is busy in a munition factory and *Pug* is going to join him. Hurriedly he leaves her, and so *Emily* faces the school meeting without a friend.

It is a hard hearted audience that *Emily* asks to let her keep the children, a group of men and women who have no sympathy with her because she is not one of them. Even the spectacle of the grim visaged woman who is the mother of the children does not help *Emily's* case, and only when the mother testifies that she is willing that the children should be taken from her forever and placed in an institution, where they will live by rule, does it dawn over *Emily's* love filled mind that no mother could act so, that no woman could see the children that she brought into the world cast into a place akin to a prison.

"How can you?" *Emily* cries. "Why, no mother in the world ever felt like that about her own children!"

"No," sneers the woman.

"She couldn't," *Emily* appeals to those about her. "It's love that mothers feel for their children. It's love that's the way God made them. And you——" *Emily* breaks off with a piercing cry of discovery, for into her heart has come the truth. "Why didn't I see it before? How blind I have been—why, you're not their mother!"

The woman is much alarmed at such a disclosure and she threatens *Emily*, but the little teacher will not go back on her statement. She drops on her knees beside little *Andy* trying to make him think back to other days. And he does—and even those who had been most anxious to send the children away sit in awed wonder, seeing probably for the first time the glory of love.

"And I can keep them?" *Emily* asks.

"Yes—at least for the present."

And the rest of the story is like a fairy tale. When she sees that *Emily* has guessed the truth the Italian woman confesses it all—how the children were kidnapped, how she and *Gresham* hoped to raise a huge ransom, and how, when the police were hot after them, they slipped away into the hills. She tells it all, and with this knowledge *Emily* starts to restore the two little ones to *Mrs. Dale*, their rightful mother, a rich young widow, who since the loss of her little ones has been caring for the little orphans of war stricken France.

At last comes the word that their mother has not only been found but that she is actually on the way to claim her children. The announcement reaches *Emily* as she is busy superintending the packing of a great case of material for the Red Cross.

"It's *Emily West* who is accountable for every good thing that's been done in this town," *Mrs. Hodges* tells a visiting writer. "There's a new spirit, like as if we'd all come to life."

All the other women who have gathered at *Mrs. Hodges's* to sew for the Red Cross agree with her, for even as the sunshine has come to bring them spring so *Emily* with her love and good fellowship for every one has changed their lives. Even old *Zekel* has forgotten to dislike children, and he and the two youngsters romp merrily through the room where once *Andy* and *Marie* were frowned upon as unwelcome visitors.

The arrival of one of the children with a belated telegram that *Mrs. Dale*, the mother of the children, is on the way sends the Red Cross ladies home in a flutter, so that *Emily* and *Mrs. Hodges* may have a chance of straightening the house preparatory to her arrival and so the mother may meet her babies alone.

At first the children are rather loath to think that the arrival of their own mother will take them away from *Emily*, but *Emily* tells them that when they meet their own mother they will love her best, that no other love in the world is like a mother's love.

When *Mrs. Dale* does arrive the children realize that the little teacher is right. Their mother tries to thank *Emily*, but the words choke her.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?" she begins. "What do you want most in all the world?"

"What I want most is to be where I am needed. I feel sure that 'over there,' where people are suffering and hungry and dying, I might be needed. Don't you think there is something I could do over there?"

"And that's what you want most?" *Mrs. Dale* asks in wonder, and she tells *Emily* all about her work in France, and says that now she has her own babies to care for some one will be needed across the waters. She offers the place to *Emily*, who joyfully accepts.

And so *Emily* is happy after all. She watches the two children go off to inspect the automobile that brought their mother from New York, and as she stands there *Pug* comes in through the open window—but a new *Pug*, resplendent in uniform. He is sailing shortly for the front, one of the first of Uncle Sam's brave boys to fight for world peace—and he has come to say good-by.

Emily's heart leaps at the sight of him, and when he tells her that he and *Batiste*, who has been talking with *Mrs. Hodges*, are going "over there," *Emily* tells of her new work.

"We'll go together," *Pug* tells her, and they do.

And one cannot help feeling, as they leave them there in the theatre, that surely the day will come when *Emily* and *Pug* will be back again to live in peace and happiness forever.

Billie Burke has finished "Let's Get a Divorce," under the direction of Charles Giblyn, from the story by Anita Loos and John Emerson. Aside from the beauty of this Paramount star, whose productions on the stage or screen always arouse comment, the general ensemble of "Let's Get a Divorce" has exquisite Florida exteriors, beautiful interiors and artistic appointments.

This is the first of the series of special stories to be written for Paramount stars by Anita Loos and John Emerson, and Director Giblyn has left nothing undone to make it a particularly pleasing photo play.

BROOKLYN PLAYS.

"So Long Letty," Oliver Morosco's musical success, will return for its third engagement at the Majestic Theatre this week. Earl Carroll wrote the words and music for the comedy, which was made over from "Your Neighbor's Wife," by Elmer Harris. The cast is still headed by Charlotte Greenwood, Sydney Grant, May Boley and Will Morrissey.

"Under Pressure," Sydney Rosenfeld's play which was produced on Broadway under the title of "The Love Drive," will be in the Montauk Theatre this week. John Westley and Helen Lord head the cast.